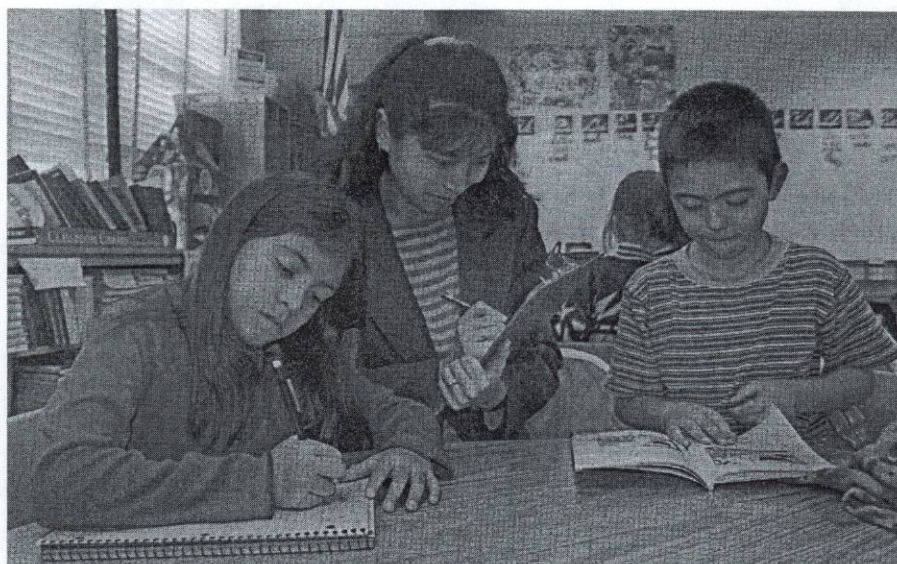


# What Is Kidwatching?



It's Friday morning in Jacquie Whitmore's first- and second-grade classroom. The children are engaged in activities of choice, and Jacquie is kidwatching. Jacquie has agreed on this morning to do a think-aloud—to share what goes on in her kidwatching mind as she observes her students daily at work and play. As she stands looking over the class, she notices that two separate groups of children have gathered to make posters for Secretary Appreciation Day. Jacquie checks in with each group, noting that the children have written messages on the posters and signed their names. Raymond is working alone on a poster but has not written a message. When Jacquie encourages him to “write something so that the secretary will know who made the poster,” Raymond responds, “I can’t remember how to spell from.”

Jacquie refers him to the class word wall, where he correctly identifies the word before copying it onto his poster.

Jacquie thinks aloud about her kidwatching: *I like Friday mornings. I purposefully use this choice time to connect with kids and understand who they are as learners. This is a time for them to pursue their own questions and develop their own strategies. It's a time for me to capture teachable moments.*

Two children are snuggled on the couch reading an alphabet book. Jacquie pauses briefly to observe. Jacquie: *I take more written notes when I conference individually with students. Right now, I'm making mental notes. It's different from what another teacher might do in that some teachers approach a class with a focus on a prescribed curriculum—they “know” what first graders need and teach it to a sea of students.*



*I'm taking this time to learn about my kids and their differences, to see what they can do, and also to determine how I can best support their needs.* Jacquie illustrates that kidwatching is as much a state of mind as a collection of techniques for gathering and reflecting on data. It is about getting to know students through observing them intelligently—and helping them work through the concepts and language issues they are raising in their own minds.

Another part of what Jacquie observes through kidwatching is the ways in which her students interact socially, and, in general, negotiate their days. For example, when Dawn, arms folded across her chest, walks in late with a glaring frown on her face, Jacquie is watching. When Dawn roughly attempts to join a group of poster makers, who try to stop her, Jacquie is watching. What makes the kidwatcher in Jacquie stand out is her positive focus on what Dawn can do and her desire to understand her students: *Dawn always comes in like that, but did you see her look at the schedule? She's reading the morning schedule and trying to fit in.* When Jacquie is eventually consulted to help resolve the situation with Dawn, she first asks the children what is happening and how they have tried to solve their problem. As a kidwatcher, Jacquie is always focused on understanding the ways in which her students are problem solving and using language so that she can help them expand their repertoires of possibilities.

Jacquie: *Lately, a lot of kids seem to be coming to me for help with things they could probably handle themselves . . . so I've been wondering if I'm encouraging that too much.* Kidwatching teachers reflect on their own practices. Jacquie knows that fertile conditions for learning must be in place if children are to fully demonstrate their knowledge. The community must be caring, the environment must be rich, and the children must feel safe to take the kinds of risks that enable them to show their understandings, explore their questions, and work with challenging concepts and material. As Jacquie kidwatches, she regularly thinks about

what she can do to fortify the learning environment. Kidwatching helps her refine her philosophy and her teaching.

When most of Jacquie's students are settled, she gathers some materials for listening to and documenting children's oral readings and retellings. She invites Chad and then Dawn to read for her, recording their miscues and filling in a form she has prepared for retellings. Jacquie: *It doesn't take long to squeeze in individualized sessions like this. Documenting miscues helps me understand how to help with reading. Dawn is predicting as she reads, but she doesn't recognize many sight words and needs more strategies for analyzing unknown words. I can use this information to help Dawn develop these strategies by placing her in a temporary group with children who have similar needs.*

The children line up at the door, ready to go to their music class. Taffy, bedecked in dark sunglasses, lingers behind, looking at an arrangement of seed packets. She and Jacquie talk for a few minutes about their plans for gardens in the spring. Taffy advises Jacquie on the kinds of corn that will grow in Alaska and asks if she can take home a packet of corn seeds for her grandmother. Jacquie: *I can definitely use the kind of information that Taffy just shared. I'll let her take home the seeds, and maybe we'll see about a journal for recording plant growth. I can also find her some books about seeds.*

Observing Jacquie, one sees that kidwatching does not interrupt or get in the way of children's learning. At the same time as students are involved in the learning plans for the day, Jacquie is involved in teaching, evaluation, and curriculum development. In her classroom, this means reaching carefully into children's worlds to help them build from the known, expand to the unknown, and expand their ways of constructing and expressing knowledge. For a kidwatcher, time spent observing, gathering data, and interacting with children is time well spent.

Jacquie is engaged on this Friday morning in the basic acts of *kidwatching*. She is (1) tak-



ing note of what her students know and can do; (2) attempting to understand their ways of constructing and expressing knowledge; and (3) using what she learns to shape her curriculum and instruction. Her observations and the wealth of data she collects enable her to respond to children in helpful, effective ways. The more Jacquie learns about her students through kidwatching, the better able she is to individualize and fine-tune her instruction. In the following sections, we describe the processes that make kidwatching work to its fullest potential:

- ▶ building an insider view of the community
- ▶ understanding how language and literacy develop
- ▶ organizing a rich environment for learning
- ▶ interacting with children
- ▶ observing and documenting children's knowledge
- ▶ analyzing data
- ▶ fostering children's self-evaluation
- ▶ engaging in self-evaluation of teaching
- ▶ using evaluation to inform instruction and build curriculum

### ***Building an Insider View***

Successful kidwatchers like Jacquie intentionally build an insider view of their students and the culture of their classrooms. In ethnographic research the *emic*, or insider's view, is essential to understanding a cultural community and the individuals within that community. Ethnographers value careful observation of phenomena by knowledgeable observers who spend time watching, interacting, taking notes, and making professionally informed interpretations (Y. Goodman 1996a). Kidwatchers add one important component to this list: they make professionally

informed teaching decisions based on the data they collect.

The aim of kidwatching is not only to "become more and more reflectively aware of the frames of interpretation [of your students but also to become more aware of your] own culturally learned frames of interpretation" (Erickson 1986, 140). It is not enough to develop insight into children's ways of thinking about and understanding the world; you must also develop insight into your own. What are your beliefs about literacy? Where do they come from? How do these beliefs influence your interpretation of classroom events and your instructional decisions? Dewey argues that "thinking in its best sense is that which considers the basis and consequences of beliefs" ([1910] 1997, 5). We believe that the same holds true of teaching. Effective teachers consciously consider what they believe about language, learning, children, and their worlds. They also consider where their beliefs come from, and how their beliefs influence the interpretations and decisions they make in the classroom. We have included questions in some of the subsequent chapters that will guide you to reflect on your personal beliefs and the ways in which they influence your teaching.

### ***Understanding How Language and Literacy Develop***

A second component of successful kidwatching is to understand how language and literacy develop. Most kidwatchers we know are informed by a *developmental*, *sociocultural* perspective on language and learning. Such a perspective is steeped in the notion that children *construct* knowledge within *unique social worlds*.

### ***Knowledge Construction***

Knowledge construction happens as children develop and test a never-ending series of hypotheses, or ideas, about the ways in which language works. For example, young writers often hypothesize that their squiggle marks or



random strings of letters spell words. "What does this say?" they ask, or "Look! I wrote *Mama*." Similarly, young readers may hypothesize that the logo on a soup can says "soup" (instead of *Campbell's*) or that the brand name on a refrigerator says "frigerator" (instead of *Amana*). Talkers test hypotheses, too. When four-year-old Cynthia says, "There's some beautiful womans in here," or six-year-old Kiara says, "My mom packed-ed me some pudding," it is easy to see that these children are bringing their knowledge together and trying to organize it into something meaningful. Research in all areas of language—speaking, listening, reading, and writing—suggests that children's hypotheses or "errors" or "miscues" are not random and in most cases can be explained by understanding how people learn. What an adult assumes to be erroneous often reflects development in the child. Children's expressions of language, or inventions, reflect their current schemas, or working models for how language works.

"When objects, events, and other people challenge the working model, the child adjusts it to account for the new information" (Bredekamp and Copple 1997, 13). From a developmental, sociocultural perspective, learning is a process of *becoming* and children become literate as internal and social forces work together to shape their understandings. When internal and social forces meet (when children meaningfully connect their ways of thinking with objects, events, and people in the environment), a sense of cognitive *tension* (Goodman and Goodman 1990) or *disequilibrium* (Ferreiro and Teberosky 1982; Piaget 1952) is often the result. That is because social experiences (which present conventional literacy information) don't always completely fit within children's working models (which often reflect their own inventions). When children experience such tension, they actively seek to reinstate a sense of equilibrium. For example, seven-year-old Ivy was playing school one day when she noticed the word *they* in print. "What does this say," she asked, "because I know T-H-A-Y spells *they*?" Ivy's

experience with convention did not fit into her working model; therefore, she sought the information she needed to expand her model, or to assimilate the information.

According to Piaget, sometimes the tension is not so easy, and children must significantly reorganize the schema, or accommodate, to make the new information fit. For example, Archie, a first grader rehearsing a readers theater script, was repeatedly reading "I could it," instead of the words he had copied on his paper: *I knew it*. Finally, he pointed to the "tricky" word and asked, "What is this?" Upon discovering that the word was *knew*, he looked as if in disbelief, and countered, "But it starts with a K!" Based on his experiences and history with print, Archie had developed a hypothesis about the sound that K could represent. Because his understanding was not yet fully developed, it was challenged and mediated—in this case, by both print *and* his social experience. When children's current working models (their current hypotheses) are challenged or mediated in a comprehensible way (either socially or by print itself), they rethink or reorganize them and move toward new understandings. In this way, social experiences become part of children's literacy histories.

### Personal and Sociocultural Influences

The vast differences both in individual children and in the objects, events, and people in their worlds make knowledge construction a different experience for every child. Some children are notoriously interested in exploring written language. Any chance they get, they have their hands on pencils, paper, books, magazines, maps, catalogs, computers—or whatever literacy materials they have in their environments. These children want to know what everybody's writing, what every sign says, what everybody's reading, and who wrote it. Other children don't pay much attention to print; either they aren't interested, they haven't yet discovered print's functions, or they're busy doing other things such as playing with toy cars, building with blocks, riding bicycles, or watching television.



Children's unique interests, favored activities, print features they attend to, ways of knowing, and dispositions influence how and to what extent they participate in early literacy events, and, in turn, the knowledge they construct.

Families contribute another layer of influence to children's literacy. Some families actively involve their children in reading the mail, listening to and telling stories, helping with the shopping, or participating in work-related activities. They may read newspapers together, write cards together, go to the bank together, or share materials from religious and cultural events. In some homes, children participate in such events in Spanish, Chinese, Hmong, or Russian, often in addition to English. In some homes, children are exposed to print in more peripheral ways. These children undoubtedly see print being used (often in more than one language), but for a variety of possible reasons, it remains primarily in the hands of others. Because different families and different cultural groups stress different kinds of activity, knowledge, uses of language, values, work, social interactions, and social organization, children develop different knowledge, and they develop knowledge differently. Individual, familial, social, and cultural forces make each child's literacy history unique.

Figure 1-1 shows that the changes that children make as they become literate extend in many directions. Rather than building one language concept at a time, children simultaneously build knowledge about myriad aspects of language, including its functions, formats, genres, meanings, sounds, grammars, visual features, and spellings (represented by solid lines). When they experience moments of tension or disequilibrium, or place their focus on new literacy concepts, things may appear to fall apart (represented by zigzag lines). Overall, the knowledge children develop, and the way they develop that knowledge, is shaped by their sociocultural experiences (represented by dotted lines). Because children have an influence on the nature of many sociocultural experiences, some

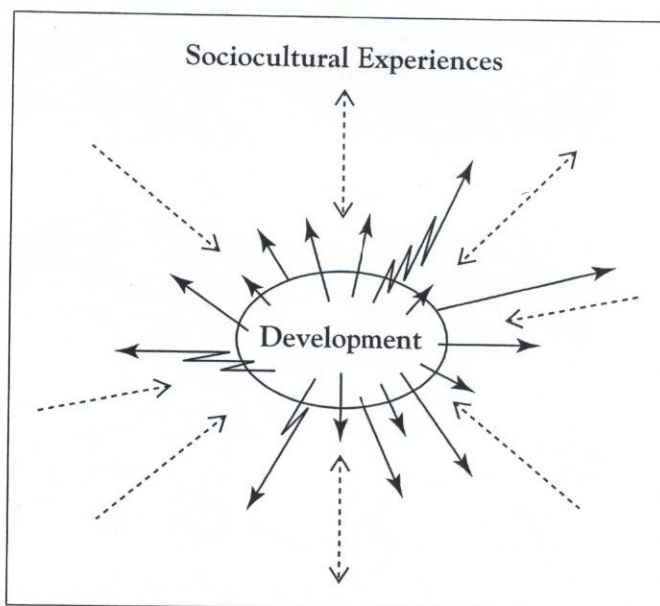


FIGURE 1-1 The Nature of Development

of the dotted lines have arrows going in two directions.

All children have literacy knowledge. In a general sense, the richer and more varied the settings and interactions, the richer the child's language and concepts will be. In a kidwatching classroom, *rich* is not absently interpreted from a school-based cultural view; nor is it narrowly defined. A sociocultural pedagogy expects "rich" to be different for every child (Oakes and Lipton 1999). Therefore, a rich experience is one that is socially and culturally meaningful *to the children having the experience*. A rich experience could range from planting strawberries to making a board game; from listening to an old aunt tell stories to taking a silent walk down a city street; from making a family recipe to writing in Spanish to relatives living in Mexico. Because rich is a construct that is socially and culturally determined, it is important to leave room for its interpretation in your classroom. Given the opportunity, your students and their families will teach you what rich means to them, and you can use that information to create a classroom that welcomes diversity. In the following sections, as we discuss organizing rich



environments for observation and interaction, it is important to consider what *rich* means to you as well as to your particular students.

### **Organizing a Rich Environment for Learning**

In order to gain useful information from kidwatching, it is necessary to organize a rich environment for learning. Evaluation provides the most significant information when it occurs simultaneously with learning experiences—as children read, write, listen, speak, perform, present, and play. In the Reggio Emilia approach to education—an approach originating in northern Italy, grounded in respect for children, their families, their communities, and their cultures—documentation is a regular part of classroom practice. Educators involved with this approach find that documentation enhances learning by showing value for children's thinking, by fostering planning between teachers and children, and by making children's learning visible. These contributions to learning became possible “because children are engaged in absorbing, complex, interesting projects worthy of documentation” (Katz and Chard 1996, 4). Children are most apt to show us what they know and can do as they engage in meaningful learning experiences. Because students show different capabilities in different contexts, kidwatchers observe them as they use language in a variety of settings, on a variety of topics, and through interaction with a variety of people.

### **Interacting with Children**

Your interactions with children as they engage in learning experiences play an important part in kidwatching—and an important part in their growth. Vygotsky describes a child's *zone of proximal development* as a cognitive state in which he or she can do with an adult or more capable peer what he or she cannot do alone. Tasks or activities within a child's zone are challenging to the child, but achievable with support; they are neither too familiar nor too

far beyond the child's current understandings. Kidwatchers intentionally seek out this zone, recognizing that “what a child can do with assistance today, she will be able to do by herself tomorrow” (Vygotsky 1978, 87). Evaluating what a child can do with guidance helps you plan immediate or future experiences that capitalize on the child's current intellectual functioning.

To keep interactions within children's zones, teachers aim at supporting new ways of thinking while ensuring that the children's curiosity for the experience remains intact. This requires an artful blend of following and leading at the same time; a skillful combination of knowing when to participate and question, and when to watch and follow. The idea is to help children see things in new ways based on the competencies they demonstrate. To do so, kidwatchers are always asking appropriate questions, posing problems relevant to children's thinking, helping children pose, develop, and refine their own questions and problems, and challenging them to explore beyond what they are thinking at the moment. In other words, the adult thinks through, or “negotiates,” concepts with the child, providing ideas and support as, if, and when they are needed (Bruner 1983). Such transactions gently invite children to consider conflicting, different, or more complex information, and often lead to moments of disequilibrium. As we saw earlier, such moments lead children to reorganize and rethink their concepts and ideas.

Interacting during kidwatching also involves *interpretive probing* (Mickleson 1990)—asking questions in order to discover what children know and why they think the way they do. For example, asking “What makes you think so?” or “Why did you choose to do it this way?” gives a teacher particular insights into a child's thinking and reasoning processes, and often entices the child into further inquiry, or disequilibrium. Such questions help children, too, to critically examine their own knowledge base and to reflect on their own learning.



Interpretive probing is also useful in small- or whole-group settings because it helps children extend their thinking by listening to and talking with others. You can prompt interpretive conversations by asking questions such as What did you notice the snails doing today? What did you wonder about? Why do you think Yasir's puppy was panting? What makes you think so? Children's responses to such questions are invaluable in helping you learn about their knowledge and plan future instructional and curricular experiences within their zones of proximal development.

More formal interactional time is also planned. Regularly planned conferences or instructional sessions (individual or small group) provide opportunities for addressing the needs of individuals and getting specific information about their reading, writing, and thinking. These sessions are planned for very specific purposes. For example, you could tape-record a child reading a passage and then analyze together the miscues that were made. You could gather a group to edit their own or a piece of class writing. Or, you could present a group of children with a cloze passage (selected words missing), supporting and observing their conversation as they decide what the missing words might be. Such activities give you insight into what students know about language as well as the content of the material, and they help students become more consciously aware of their own thinking processes.

### ***Observing and Documenting Children's Knowledge***

Observation and documentation are about "getting to know each child in as many different contexts as possible—to know each child as a person unique in all the world" (O'Keefe 1996). The first step in observation is having up-to-date knowledge about language—about general patterns of development as well as the sociocultural nature of language learning. General patterns serve as indicators of growth and guide teachers in

determining where to go next in their planning and instruction. Researchers have documented general developmental patterns in areas such as print awareness, book handling, reading, writing, and spelling. In subsequent chapters, some of the checklists we include reflect general developmental patterns. However, kidwatching teachers don't let general patterns get in the way of discovering the uniqueness of each child. They know that each child's developmental sequence is different. Children often surprise us with their fresh and inventive views of the world.

It is also important in observation to be aware of the role of error in language learning. Because errors, inventions, and miscues are expressions of language and concepts as they currently exist in the child's schema, they are thoughtfully documented and studied by kidwatchers. As children develop conceptually and linguistically, kidwatchers watch for errors (inventions, miscues) to shift from representing unsophisticated conclusions to showing greater sophistication (Dewey [1910] 1997; Ferreiro and Teberosky 1982).

As a kidwatcher, it is important to help children and families understand that errors are really not mistakes. Developmentally, errors (we prefer the terms *inventions* and *miscues*) are to be expected. Dewey argues that insisting upon avoidance of error tends to interrupt children's discourse and thought, and may cause hesitancy in their willingness to express themselves through language. "Children who begin with something to say and with intellectual eagerness to say it are sometimes made so conscious of minor errors in substance and form that the energy that should go into constructive thinking is diverted into anxiety not to make mistakes, and even, in extreme cases, into passive quiescence as the best method of minimizing error" (Dewey [1910] 1997, 186). Allowing errors does not equate with negligent teaching. In fact, teachers who "do not allow errors to occur . . . do not allow children to think" (Ferreiro and Teberosky 1982, 218). Children do not refine their hypotheses because we tell



them they are wrong or tell them the right way. They refine hypotheses as they actively explore them, try them out in all kinds of social situations, and receive instruction within their zones of proximal development. Kidwatchers track progress over time by documenting children's knowledge, including that which is revealed through their unconventional uses of language. And, instead of using the terms *mistake* or *wrong*, they use *miscue* and *invention* to value children's constructions.

The central task of observation is to document what children know, as well as their ways of constructing and expressing knowledge. Observation and documentation happen when you step aside from your oral interactions with children to observe from the sidelines or when you interact with your whole class, meet with a small group, confer with a single student, or participate in a quick over-the-shoulder conference. Sometimes you capture observations through anecdotal notes, while other times you collect artifacts such as oral reading samples, taped recordings of children's reading, retellings, responses to literature, writing samples, answers to interview questions, and children's self-reflections on their learning. To organize yourself to observe each child, it is helpful to establish a routine. Some teachers, along with regular informal observations, plan to intensively observe every student at least once every two weeks. They make a schedule that involves observing two to three children per day. Other teachers do such recordings once a month or twice a semester.

### Anecdotal Records

The general procedure for recording observations is to rotate around the room at different times of the day or week, taking anecdotal notes and collecting artifacts from each student working in different content areas, different settings, and different kinds of activities. For example, you might record children's choices during play, the strategies they use as they read and write, or the oral

language they use as they participate in literacy events. The key is to focus on the kinds of information that will inform your instructional decision making. You may find it helpful to keep a few notebooks or pads of sticky notes in strategic places around the classroom so that you do not "lose" important critical moments. Or, prepare a note-taking form with the name of each child on it (see Figure 1-2) and keep a few of those around the classroom.

Another option is to prepare one form per child (see Figure 1-3). A quick note on such a form can stand by itself or be expanded at a more convenient time. Many teachers take ten minutes at the end of the day to catch up on their note taking and reflect on the events of the day. This happens after the children go home, or just before they leave, as they are writing or drawing to reflect on their learning (Short, Harste, and Burke 1996).

Yet another option is to record notes of a more specific, planned nature. For example, you may decide to focus in depth on one child's reading strategies, writing strategies, talk, interests, or attitudes—or all of these (see Figure 1-4). Such notes, particularly useful for students who need extra support from you, are kept in the student's personal work folder so that they can be reflected on and referred to again and again.

### Field Notes

Field notes are useful when you are observing for extended periods of time (three to ten minutes). They include in-depth descriptions of children's solitary activity and social interactions, often in the form of scripts. Field notes should be planned strategically, at times when you are likely to see the kinds of activity that are most informative for your literacy instruction. An example from Christian Bush's first-grade classroom is shown in Figure 1-5. In the example, Archie and Robert are in the midst of writing a text for a wordless picture book; Christian observes and documents for approximately ten minutes.

Teachers gain many insights into children's knowledge and thinking as they ana-



Angelica 3/1 Reads <i>Brown Bear</i> aloud—points to words *Arrange for A. to read aloud to class	Aurora	Diego	Edilberto 3/3 Tells Josh how to spell love (LVOE) 3/8 Lists things he likes: PL (pool), MOM, POKEMON
Hannah	Ivy	Jacob	Joshua
Jordan	Lauren	Lavonya 3/1 Observing Angelica. Points out to me the rhymes in <i>Brown Bear</i>	Madison
-Matthew 3/1 Guinness Record book—again. *I need to read sections aloud to whole class.	Marlie	Megan	Michael
Noah	Pao 3/8 Using English in Science Center: “float” “sink” “try this”	Piper Kay 3/3 Drawing/talking about Pokemon. 3/8 Pokemon. Labels characters when suggested.	Preston
Ronnie	Taylor	Ty'Ree	William

FIGURE 1-2 Sample Note-Taking Form for Whole-Class Observations

lyze field notes. For example, Christian's field notes reveal that Archie:

- ▶ contributes ideas directly related to the pictures
- ▶ makes connections across pages
- ▶ understands importance of rereading for meaning
- ▶ brings in personal experiences not directly referenced in pictures
- ▶ attends to punctuation



Name: <i>Piper Kay</i>	
<b>Literacy Event and Date:</b>	<b>Instructional Implications:</b>
4/22 medical chart notes on height	show different ways ht. measures are written
4/29 pretends a blank piece of paper is a menu	suggest menu-making/bring in menus for play
5/6 writing prices for items on menu	use menus to show how to note monetary values

FIGURE 1-3 Note-Taking Form for Single-Child Observations

Child's Name: _____			
Scheduled Observation Dates: _____			
Settings Observed	Individual	One-to-one or Small Group (record which)	Whole Class
Reading/Discussing Print/Interests and Attitudes Toward Reading			
Writing/Discussing Classroom Writing/Interests and Attitudes Toward Writing			
Oral Language			

Reproducible, see p. 96

FIGURE 1-4 Detailed Observation Form

- ▶ demonstrates concept of word
- ▶ breaks words into parts for spelling
- ▶ attends to legibility

### Checklists

Checklists provide a quick way to record accomplishments, understandings, processes, or strategies. Depending on your purpose, they are designed to record one child's information, or information from the whole class. Chapters 2 through 7 provide a variety of checklists that you can use as starting points as you think through what is appropriate to evaluate in your own classroom. Ultimately, designing your own checklists is important because it compels you to consciously consider what you value and to establish criteria for analyzing *your* children's processes and products. Checklists are most useful during the first few months of the year as you are getting to know children and their competencies. As you know your students better, less formal observations are more easily made because you are more apt to spontaneously recognize information that will add to the profile of the student's knowledge and development. Checklists are most useful when you adapt them over the school year to match your children's development.

In using checklists, keep in mind that teachers typically do not look for elements of development that are simply "there" or "not there," but rather seek "to understand the children's personal language in order to help them become effective language users" (Mickleson 1990, 18). Thus, many teachers leave spaces on their checklists for filling in additional information. This way, the list provides a beginning organizational scheme for notes, but does not limit the information that may be recorded. Teachers tell us that they adapt their checklists often in response to what they learn through the kidwatching process.

Checklists also serve as a tool for analyzing data. For example, if you design a checklist that delineates writing strategies, you could use it as you examine your anecdotal notes



Wordless Picture Books/ February 10

Robert doing all writing.

Archie: Some food you have to peel. Some you got to peel . . . Some . . . got to be peeled. What do you have writed so far?

Robert: Some you peel.

Archie: Erase peel. Got. Gahhh.

Archie asks Robert to reread after every 2 words or so. Robert's spelling is pretty good, but Archie's having difficulty reading it.

Archie: Let's do . . . uh, took—check their money, Robert. Check their money. Check . . . their . . . money.

Robert: Where should I put it? [rereads] They are buying some food. Some are already buyed. There are some foods you got to peel. Some people check their lists. [writing and talking]

Archie: Some people hate fruit. Not don't like; hate fruit—I mean vegetables.

Robert writes "Some people hate vegetables."

Archie: Robert, that don't look like an O. [he erases and corrects] There are food on the counter—c-oun-t-er [says as to sound it out for Robert] Okay, Robert are you done?

Robert: Yeah.

Archie: Okay, put a period. The man buyed the food and then the children eat it. No, I mean cooks the food. She already buyed it.

Me: Make sure you practice reading this because you'll be recording it today.

Archie: What if I can't read it?

Me: You said most of the ideas . . .

Archie: Okay [hesitantly].

FIGURE 1-5 Christian's Field Notes

and writing samples. The checklist helps you identify the range of strategies that each child is currently using and plan specific kinds of instruction that are warranted. Note that many of Archie's listed strengths in the previous section reflect items typically included on a reading strategy checklist. Checklists that reflect developmental continua are also useful for showing changes in growth and development.

Whichever ways you choose to record, it is important to remember that the information you collect must be useful to you: it must be worth evaluating and must be revealing of children's knowledge and growth.

If any recording device you are using is not working, be sure to experiment with new techniques.

### Analyzing Data

Analysis of reading, writing, and oral language happens during all parts of kidwatching—as you observe, interact, and reflect with children on their learning. The notes and artifacts you collect are invaluable tools that warrant careful attention because they provide you with deep insights into what children know and can do, as well as into their ways of constructing and expressing knowledge. These are



essential insights for helping children build their language competencies.

To prepare materials for analysis, teachers typically organize them into some sort of folder. Sturdy folders with pockets and three prongs, or folders with a closing clasp or band, work well because they hold all sorts of materials and can be stored all together in a box. Consider including a date stamp near the box so that children can easily record the date before filing their material. Some possibilities for organization follow:

1. Place materials into general categories. Depending on your students, consider the following: (a) information on identity as a reader and writer; (b) book handling information; (c) oral reading and retelling audiotapes and notes; (d) writing samples; (e) projects; (f) information collected during play. Document knowledge and growth in each area.
2. Organize materials into three very general sections (reading; writing; oral language) with subcategories for each section. Document knowledge and growth in each area:
  - A. reading
    1. reading samples
    2. print awareness inventory
    3. checklists and profile forms
    4. list of child's preferred genres and topics for reading
    5. list of books and other materials that have been read
    6. retellings, sketches, illustrations, and drawings used to share readings
    7. reading interviews and interest inventories
    8. self-evaluations
    9. anecdotal records and informal notes
  - B. writing
    1. writing samples
    2. spelling evaluations
    3. list of child's preferred genres and topics for writing

4. list of pieces written, including genres and topics
5. self-evaluations
6. checklists and profile forms
7. anecdotal records and informal notes
- C. oral language
  1. retellings
  2. anecdotal records and informal notes
  3. notes and transcripts from literature discussions
  4. transcripts from discussions about a project
  5. oral presentations
  6. reporting in class about current events, readings, or topics of interest

Consider whether the materials you collect should be placed in a cumulative folder, in a work folder (some teachers call it a *portfolio*), or both. Work folders typically contain self- or jointly selected pieces of work from the child, audiotapes, the child's self-evaluations, and goals for future learning. These are the kinds of items that are regularly referred back to by teacher and child. Cumulative folders are kept by the teacher and used to document a child's full literacy learning history. Cumulative folders contain information that is used to report knowledge and growth over the years, and to share with children, families, other teachers, and administrators when appropriate. These are passed on with the child to the next grades.

### Using Questions as a Basis for Analysis

Using a set of questions helps to focus your analysis. We use three general questions as we examine data: (1) What does the child know about language? (2) What evidence is there that language development is taking place? and (3) When a child produces something unexpected or unconventional, what does it tell about the child's knowledge of language? This information is used to plan curriculum and in-



struction. Following are some examples of more specific questions to consider:

- ▶ In which settings does the child use more or less oral language?
- ▶ In which settings does the child appear to be comfortable?
- ▶ In which contexts does the child work alone; seem to prefer to work with others?
- ▶ Is the child attentive during discussions when other children or the teacher is speaking?
- ▶ With which classmates does a less talkative child communicate the most?
- ▶ Which activities does the child initiate?
- ▶ In what ways does the child adapt and adjust language to new situations and settings?
- ▶ When is the child successful in getting things done?
- ▶ When does the child seem confused?
- ▶ In what settings does the child need further support?

Expect your questions to change as children change and develop, and as your knowledge of the class, your children, and child development changes and develops.

### ***Fostering Children's Self-Evaluation***

The most important type of evaluation is self-evaluation because it helps children become critically aware of their own thinking and learning processes. Even very young children are able to recognize their strengths, think about what they need to do and learn in order to accomplish their language goals, and consciously work toward improving in areas of need. When you share your collected information with your students, and invite them to collect and share information of their own, you support their self-evaluation. Individual, small-group, or whole-class confer-

ences can be used to help children understand the purposes of self-evaluation, to discuss how you document children's knowledge and growth, and to encourage children to self-evaluate by asking themselves the following questions:

- ▶ What do I know? What am I learning?
- ▶ What am I using reading and writing for? How else would I like to be able to use it? How can I learn to do that?
- ▶ What am I doing well? What could I improve?
- ▶ How are things going in particular areas (such as literature circles or writing workshop)? What can I do to make them go better next time?
- ▶ What goals do I hope to achieve?

Record younger children's responses for them, and help older children record their own. Self-evaluation helps students recognize the significance of their own learning and extends and refines the meaning of their learning experiences.

Kidwatchers and family members get together for evaluation conferences on a regular basis. Conferences enable you and your students to provide parents with a detailed account of children's capabilities and growth. In fact, the rich set of data enables parents to do their own evaluating. "Reporting progress to parents . . . is most successful when it helps [them] to evaluate growth themselves" (K. Goodman 1991, 252). Family members are encouraged to participate in other kidwatching processes as well. Many teachers invite parents to introduce their child early in the school year through face-to-face conferences or a personal letter. They invite them to take anecdotal notes (at home or school), collect children's writing samples, list what they read and write at home—and add all of this information to the child's work folder. Parents also fill out questionnaires, or dialogue in journals between home and school, to provide the teacher with extra insights and information.



Planning and reflecting with children and families help you get to know their experiences, interests, preferences, and goals, and to develop a shared sense of not only what is expected of children but also what is possible for them.

### ***Engaging in Self-Evaluation of Teaching***

Carefully observing children's progress helps you to thoughtfully evaluate your own progress as a teacher. As you are reflecting on children's activity, it is natural to reflect on the contributions you are making to their learning. The kinds of questions kidwatching teachers ask about themselves include the following:

- ▶ How do my interactions facilitate children's learning?
- ▶ What is working well and not working well?
- ▶ Am I providing materials, conditions, and experiences that allow my students to show what they know? What might prevent them from showing what they know?
- ▶ How might my beliefs about language and literacy influence the opportunities I provide?
- ▶ Am I allowing for exploration of multiple literacies?

Examining your own evaluation practices helps you reach new ground as an evaluator and makes evaluation a positive teaching-learning experience.

### ***Using Evaluation to Inform Instruction***

The purpose of kidwatching is to help children build their capabilities to use language to communicate and learn. Teachers achieve this by inquiring into who children are, what they know, what they can do, and how they learn. Because some knowledge is evident in children's daily language and actions, kidwatchers are always observing with a watchful, reflective eye. Because other knowledge lies beneath the surface, kidwatchers transact with children and their families to unearth what else is there. Teachers make these efforts in order to support children as they build upon their existing literacy knowledge and practices—or, in other words, in order “to keep alive the sacred spark of wonder and to fan the flame that already glows” (Dewey [1910] 1997, 33–34). Teaching with a kidwatching eye offers a dignity to children by affirming the legitimacy of their own experiences, and of using them to learn. And of course, in a classroom where children are so esteemed, there is dignity in teaching.